

WU?@therep

VANYA AND SONIA AND MASHA AND SPIKE

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by **Christopher Durang**
Directed by **Michael Evan Haney**



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the 411

At The Rep, we know that life moves fast—okay, really fast. But we also know that some things are worth

slowing down for. We believe that live theatre is one of those pit stops worth making and are excited that you are going to stop by for a show. To help you get the most bang for your buck, we have put together **WU? @ THE REP**—an IM guide that will give you everything you need to know to get at the top of your theatergoing game—fast. You'll find character descriptions (**A/S/L**), a plot summary (**FYI**), biographical information (**F2F**), historical context (**B4U**), and other bits and pieces (**HTH**). Most importantly, we'll have some ideas about what this all means **IRL**, anyway.

CU@therep!



The Teacher's Lounge

In an effort to make our educational materials accessible to students and easy for educators to incorporate into the classroom, our study guide is written in a student-oriented format. We hope that you will circulate this guide among your students in the weeks preceding your visit to The Rep, encouraging them to browse it before and after class and as time allows, using it as a launch point for both pre- and post-performance discussions. You may also want to visit our website, www.repstl.org, for additional information including activity suggestions and behind-the-scenes information. Any materials, either from this guide or from our website may be reproduced for use in the classroom.

NEATO!

As always, we appreciate your making live theatre a part of your classroom experience and welcome your feedback and questions.

WELCOME!

The desire to learn, insatiable when awakened, can sometimes lie dormant until touched by the right teacher or the right experience. We at The Rep are grateful to have the opportunity to play a role supporting you as you awaken the desire for learning in your students.

Christopher Durang is known for his outrageous comedies that, underneath the absurdity, have profound searches for optimism and connection with others. The story told by the endearingly eccentric characters in this play show us why Durang is a member of the American Theater Hall of Fame.

It would be a good idea to take a minute on the bus to give your students these quick theatre etiquette reminders:

- This show has one intermission; there will be time for bathroom breaks before the show and halfway through.
- The actors can hear the audience and appreciate the laughter, gasps and quiet attention to action. However, talking, moving around and eating is very distracting to others and can dampen the energy of what is happening on stage.
- Pictures, phone calls and texting are not allowed at any time during the performance.

Live theatre won't allow your students to take a passive role—they must work with us to create the experience which takes the learning deeper. Our unique ability to fuse words and images onstage allows your students to explore new ideas as well as excites their imaginations. We will do our part so your students will be stirred to understandings and self-awareness while delving into new and familiar worlds. You are doing your part by using The Rep to extend your intellectual and aesthetic curriculum.

Thank you!

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A/S/L

R/B/T

SPOILER ALERT!
You may want to save this section for after you see the play

VANYA: 50s, lives in Bucks County with Sonia, his adopted sister; resigned to his life, more or less, at least compared to Sonia

SONIA: early 50s, lives in Bucks County with Vanya; discontent, upset, regretful

MASHA: 50s, Vanya and Sonia's sister; a B-list movie actress who gallivants around the world

SPIKE: 29, Masha's new companion; an aspiring actor who's very attractive but self-absorbed

NINA: 20s, niece of Vanya and Sonia's neighbors; an energetic and sincere would-be actress who is star struck by Masha

CASSANDRA: Vanya and Sonia's odd housekeeper; a soothsayer who often makes ominous predictions

LONELINESS

Although no one in the play is alone in the physical sense, there's definitely abundant loneliness. Vanya and Sonia obviously live together and have each other, but both crave romantic and social companionship. And even though it appears that Masha has that with Spike, it becomes clear their relationship is far from being emotionally fulfilling. It's interesting that at the end of the play when Masha is "alone" she feels the least lonely.

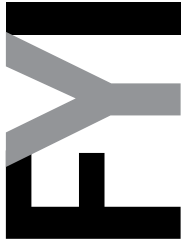
AGING

The experience of aging is practically another character in this play. Sonia seems to be almost obsessive over the thought that it may be too late for her to have a life. Nina and Spike's youth seems to be a catalyst for the other characters' self-awareness. Masha resents Nina for her youthful beauty because it reminds Masha of the alluring ingénue spark she's since lost. She seems to think that dating Spike, who's nearly half her age, will make her feel young again, but if anything, it makes her feel older. Spike awakens something in Vanya, who has grown into middle age without really exploring his life. And although some may call Nina naïve, her young idealism inspires Vanya to open up and show everyone his play.

HOPE

As depressing as the characters' storylines can be, there is still a strong sense of hope for each of them. By getting back in touch with her roots, Masha has gained greater self-awareness, which is allowing her to make healthier, more compassionate decisions. Sonia, who has complained of never having really lived or found a life outside of her childhood home, has an upcoming date. We're not given any sense that this may be the love of her life, but it's a trip outside her comfort zone, which is often the most character-building decision a person can make. Vanya, who has always been mild-mannered and hesitant to bring any sort of attention to himself, takes a leap of faith by sharing his play with everybody. It might not have gone perfectly, but it sparked a defining moment for Vanya, in which he asserted himself.





SPOILER ALERT!

IT'S PRESENT DAY in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and Sonia is angry with her older brother Vanya. She always prepares his coffee for him, but today he got it himself. It becomes clear very soon that this is a typical squabble between siblings, who are both unmarried, in their 50s, and are still living together in the house where they grew up.

WHILE VANYA AND SONIA are chatting, their housekeeper, Cassandra, walks in and makes one of her predictions—a regular occurrence that Vanya and Sonia are accustomed to. This time she predicts they will lose the house, which causes Sonia to suddenly remember that their somewhat famous sister Masha (who actually owns the house) is coming to visit. Masha, who is also in her 50s, bursts in and says how happy she is to see her siblings and the house. On her heels is her “beloved,” 29-year-old Spike.

MASHA HAS EXCITING NEWS for her siblings. She's been invited to a costume party that's being thrown by a very wealthy woman just up the road, and she wants Vanya and Sonia to come with her. Hearing about how busy Masha is and seeing that she has a hot, young boyfriend, Sonia becomes even more depressed about her boring life and leaves the room. Spike decides to take a swim in the pond outside and strips down to his underwear in front of everyone.

SONIA SOON RETURNS, and Masha tries to cheer her up by saying she has had her own fair share of missed opportunities and regrets. She meant to be a classical actress, but got a role in a mainstream hit and instead became just a rich movie star. Unsurprisingly, Sonia does not have much sympathy for Masha.

EVENTUALLY, THE SUBJECT switches to the party. Masha has brought a Snow White costume and wants Vanya and Sonia to go as dwarves. Sonia does not want to go as a

dwarf and says she will go as the “beautiful” Evil Queen. Masha says to do whatever will make her happy because she only wants to “be around happy people.”

JUST THEN SPIKE enters with Nina, a pretty young woman he met at the pond. She's the niece of Vanya and Sonia's neighbors and says that Masha is her favorite actress. Spike tells them he invited Nina to come with them to the costume party. Masha is obviously threatened, but she keeps her composure and says Nina is welcome to come. After Nina leaves, Masha goes to lie down, Sonia leaves to find a costume, and Spike and Vanya eat lunch together.

LATER THAT EVENING, everyone is gathering to leave for the party. Masha is dressed as Snow White, Spike as Prince Charming, and Vanya as Doc, the dwarf. Nina shows up dressed as a princess, and Masha isn't pleased. She tells Nina that her costume must relate to Snow White, and they luckily have an extra dwarf costume for her.

WHILE MASHA IS grabbing the costume, Nina gets into a conversation with Vanya and tells him that he and Sonia probably have hidden talents that no one knows about. Vanya admits to Nina that he's written a play. He's embarrassed but promises to let her read it. Sonia eventually enters wearing a gown and looking beautiful, though not particularly like the Evil Queen from Snow White. Resigned, Masha says she'll just have to explain to everyone at the party that Sonia is supposed to be the Evil Queen.

BEFORE THEY LEAVE, Masha informs Vanya and Sonia that she plans to sell the house because she's hardly ever there. Vanya and Sonia are obviously upset, but Masha says they need to get to the party, and they'll talk about it later. As soon as Nina comes out in her new costume as Dopey, they leave.



WHEN THEY RETURN later that night, Masha is in a terrible mood. Everyone at the party talked about how much they liked Sonia's costume and how great she looked; no one even seemed to know who Masha was dressed as. And to top it off, Spike left to drive Nina home, and Masha is anxious about them being alone together. She admits she feels her life is over after five failed marriages. Sonia tells Masha that at least she's lived. Sonia and Vanya were stuck at home caring for their sick parents while Masha was off making movies. They both are crying when Vanya returns with tea. Spike soon also returns, and Masha is relieved. They go upstairs to bed.

THE NEXT DAY, Cassandra is doing some kind of voodoo on a Snow White doll to try and send thoughts to Masha to make her not want to sell the house. Every time she sticks a pin in the doll, a scream is heard from Masha. Vanya enters and tells Cassandra that he doesn't approve of voodoo, but he can't help but be impressed. Later Nina returns to read Vanya's play; Vanya requests that they go out to the pond to read it so that no one overhears them.

AFTER THEY GO out to the pond, someone named Joe calls asking for Sonia. She's shocked and doesn't remember who he is at first. It turns out he was a guest from the party, and was quite taken with her. He's calling to ask her out on a date. Though she is hesitant at first, she says yes. She's nervous and bewildered but also hopeful.

LATER, EVERYONE has gathered to read Vanya's play, an activity that Vanya has reluctantly agreed to with Nina's insistence. Spike is texting through the entire read-through and infuriates Vanya who then goes on an emotional rant about how so much has changed over the generations. Nothing is simple anymore. With cable and satellite these days, no one even watches a

national television show together. "There are no shared memories anymore," he says. He storms out of the room, and Sonia and Nina follow him out.

MASHA CALLS SPIKE OUT on his rudeness and looks at his phone seeing that he's been texting her much younger assistant, Hootie Pie. Spike admits that he's in love with Hootie Pie, and they plan to move in together. Spike apologizes if he's hurt Masha, but she actually feels unexpected relief that Spike is leaving. She asks Cassandra to drive him to the bus stop. She then calls Vanya and Sonia back into the room to tell them that she's not planning on selling the house anymore.

MASHA SAYS SHE'S going to take a walk by the pond to reevaluate the events of the past couple days as well as the past 15 years of her life. Vanya suggests that he and Sonia get jobs rather than solely depend on Masha's generosity. Sonia doesn't love the idea, but the three siblings are clearly more on the same page now than they've been in a long time. Nina then leaves and promises to visit her aunt and uncle more often so that she can see all of them regularly. After Masha returns from her walk, she, Vanya and Sonia sit and listen to music together, looking out over the pond.



costume rendering by
Costume Designer Anne Kennedy





CHRISTOPHER DURANG

Christopher Durang is the master of irony and especially black satire. Many flock to his plays for their wicked humor that often touches on serious topics such as alcoholism, mental illness, divorce, disease and religion. Not only are audiences usually guaranteed a laugh, but also a wise and witty insight into the human condition.

EARLY INSPIRATION

When he was eight years old, Durang wrote his own two-page version of an *I Love Lucy* episode, and a teacher at his Catholic grade school let his class perform it one afternoon instead of doing geography. "I got to choose the cast and 'direct,'" Durang said in a 1987 interview with *BOMB Magazine*. "My fellow eight-year-olds laughed at the play, and I thought, 'Yes, playwriting is for me!'"

Encouragement from teachers continued in prep school. He wrote a musical with his friend at the age of 13, and the drama department put on the full-length show. This kind of support gave Durang a special appreciation for teachers.

"I was fortunate with many wonderful teachers," he has said. "I get so upset when people in the country bad-mouth teachers and seem angry that they want to make a living wage."

IVY LEAGUE EDUCATION

Durang went on to receive a B.A. in English from Harvard and an M.F.A. in Playwriting from Yale School of Drama. While at Yale, he had several of his plays presented at the school. His first professional production was *The Idiots Karamazov* in 1974, which was co-written with a fellow student and starred then Yale Drama student Meryl Streep as a nutty, 80-year old woman.

ON AND OFF-BROADWAY

In 1978, Durang premiered on Broadway with *A History of the American Film*, which earned him a Tony nomination for Best Book of a Musical. The playwright had another

success the next year with *Das Lusitania Songspiel*, which was co-written and co-performed with Durang's Yale classmate and friend Sigourney Weaver—who would later go on to star as the aging actress Masha in the original production of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*. *Das Lusitania Songspiel* was performed as a late-night Off-Broadway satirical review and became a cult success. Durang and Weaver were both nominated for Drama Desk Awards for Best Performer in a Musical.

Durang continued to have a prominent career both as a playwright and actor. In 1985, he won Obie Awards for writing and acting in one of his most successful plays, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, a black comedy that dissected marriage and family in a scathing yet humorous tone.

STAGE AND SCREEN SUCCESS

The year 1987 was a busy one for Durang on the screen as well as on the stage. He served as a staff writer for the ABC special *Carol and Robin and Whoopi and Carl*, which starred comedic heavyweights Carol Burnett, Robin Williams, Whoopi Goldberg and Carl Reiner. That same year, Durang appeared in the film *The Secret Of My Success*, starring Michael J. Fox. Playing a put-upon executive named Davis, Durang wrote much of his own dialogue. That year Durang's hilarious and absurd play *Laughing Wild* premiered on Off-Broadway.



AT JULLIARD

Since 1994, Durang has co-chaired the Juilliard playwrights program with fellow playwright Marsha Norman. Much like his reverence for teachers, Durang also has a great respect for his students. In a 2012 interview with the *Juilliard Journal*, Durang said: “[A] nice thing I find is that when a student is excited and inspired by the play he or she is writing, it often encourages me to go home and start a new play.”

In the same interview, Durang is not short on advice for his aspiring playwright students.

“I hope for all of them that they discover an inner sense of their own worth as writers,” he’s said. “And that they learn how to ‘know’ when their work is already good, and not take the advice of so many people out in the theatre world who are anxious to tell them how to rewrite their plays. I mean, you must be open if your play needs to be rewritten radically—sometimes it does ...Rewriting is necessary, but hold on to the play you want to write, and don’t get mixed up with pleasing people or assuming everyone else knows better.”



THEATER OF THE ABSURD

Once deemed “our Poet Laureate of the Absurd” by the *New York Observer*, Durang’s plays often have silly, illogical elements to them. In *Laughing Wild*, a woman has a mental breakdown because a man is standing in her way in the tuna fish aisle. In *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, a priest impersonates a strip of frying bacon. In *Baby With the Bathwater* (1983), two new unprepared parents are disappointed that their baby doesn’t speak English and are “too polite” to check its gender so they decide the baby is a girl named Daisy, when in fact Daisy is actually a boy.

Durang has admitted to being a fan of Theatre of the Absurd. Never heard of it? The theater critic Martin Esslin first coined the term in his 1960 essay “Theatre of the Absurd.” He wrote that in absurdist plays, there’s a “dismissal of realism” and “logical construction and argument gives way to irrational and illogical speech.” However, stories from the Theater of the Absurd are not just plain nonsense; in fact, Esslin said that “they have something to say and can be understood,” but the viewer is often left to draw his or her own conclusions. Although there was no official Absurdist movement, playwrights typically associated with the style include Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*, 1953) and Eugène Ionesco (*Rhinoceros*, 1959).

Something else that’s interesting to note is Durang’s preferred delivery of absurdist language. In a 1987 interview with *BOMB Magazine*, he said he felt it was far less funny if actors would speak his dialogue in an exaggerated, almost cartoonish manner. While he was a student at Yale, he valued the talented performers’ ability to perform his plays’ absurdist aspects in a more understated style.

“Most of the actors seemed (to know) intuitively to both keep it simple and to make it oddly believable,” he said. “[They] would treat it as if they meant what they said. It was both funnier and ‘deeper’ that way. It gave the audience a sense that people in life act in an exaggerated way, as they do.”

Food for thought: Although *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* isn’t strictly classified under the Theater of the Absurd, it definitely contains some absurdist elements—can you name a few?





ANTON CHEKHOV

A prolific Russian writer of the late 19th century, Anton Chekhov was considered the “master of the modern short story.” However, he was also a very successful playwright whose plays focused more on character development and inner conflict rather than plot. Devices Chekhov commonly used include personal epiphanies, stream of consciousness, and pessimism mixed with humor. His plays often had strong themes of morality with no concrete solutions, as he always posed questions of right and wrong for the audience or reader to decide rather than provide them with the answer.

EARLY LIFE

Born in 1860 in Taganrog, Russia, Chekhov was the third of eventually six children. His mother, Yevgeniya, was the daughter of a cloth merchant with whom she had traveled around the world. She often told her children stories of the little adventures she had during this time. Chekhov’s father, Pavel, was a struggling grocer and son of a former serf. Also a pious disciplinarian, Pavel had his son work in his shop and sing in the choir, which he conducted. “Our talents we got from our father, but our soul from our mother,” Chekhov has said of his parents.

EDUCATION AND EARLY CAREER

When Chekhov was in high school, his father went bankrupt and moved the family to Moscow to make a fresh start. Chekhov stayed behind to finish school, supporting himself by tutoring younger students. In 1879, Chekhov finally joined his family in Moscow and enrolled in university to become a doctor, graduating in 1884. Because his father could only find low-paying employment, Chekhov became the primary breadwinner for his family through his job as a doctor but also freelance earnings he made from writing articles and anecdotes for humorous journals. “Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress,” Chekhov once wrote in an 1888 letter to a colleague. “When I get tired of one I spend the night with the other.”

In the late 1880s, Chekhov’s writing turned more serious and contained autobiographical

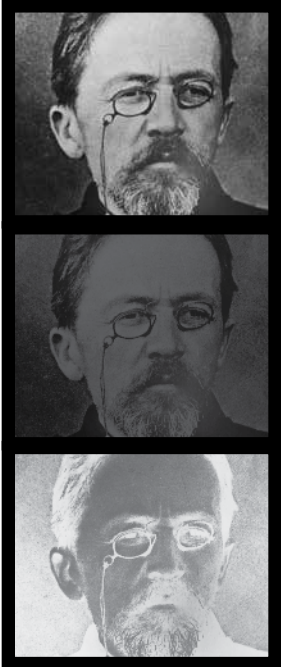
aspects, and many times, medical themes that reflected his other profession. In 1888, he published “Steppe” in the leading literary review *Northern Herald*. The long story described a journey through Ukraine from a child’s perspective. During this time, Chekhov also published the plays *Ivanov* (1887) and *The Wood Demon* (1889), which told the stories of educated men coping with debt, disease and disappointment. He also wrote “A Dreary Story” (1889), which delved into the mind of an elderly, dying professor of medicine.

SAKHALIN EXPEDITION

Chekhov’s emerging popularity attracted its fair share of admirers but also critics who disparaged the lack of political stance and direction in his stories. Irritated with what he felt was unnecessary criticism, Chekhov embarked in 1890 on a one-man, 6,000-mile sociological expedition to the Island of Sakhalin, a penal settlement east of Moscow. Chekhov published in a popular research thesis his findings of the brutal conditions endured by the more than 10,000 convicts living there.

COUNTRY LIVING IN MELIKHOVO

After aiding the famine relief effort of 1891-92, Chekhov bought a country estate in the village of Melikhovo where he lived for six years with his aging parents and sister. It was here that he wrote a plethora of short stories depicting everyday Russian life, including village life in “Peasants” (1897) and the commercial and factory world in





Anton Chekhov and Olga Knipper, 1901

“A Woman’s Kingdom” (1894), among many others. His stories from this time period were so detailed and accurate that many view them as sociological sources in addition to works of fiction.

It was also during this time that Chekhov wrote *The Seagull*, which explored the theme of older and younger generations clashing. Originally mislabeled as a comedy, *The Seagull* premiered in 1896 and was so badly received—many reports say it was even booed off stage—that Chekhov swore off playwrighting. However, it was adapted quite successfully two years later at a different theatre, and it re-established Chekhov as a distinguished dramatist. His *Wood Demon* experienced a conversion of its own during this period and was published as *Uncle Vanya* in 1897. Cut down in length and now depicting aimlessness in a rural manor house, *Uncle Vanya*, along with *The Seagull*, is considered one of Chekhov’s masterpieces.

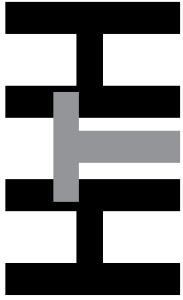
YALTA, MARRIAGE AND DEATH

In March 1897, Chekhov suffered a lung hemorrhage caused by tuberculosis. Semi-disabled, Chekhov sold his Melikhovo estate and built a villa in Yalta. In 1901, Chekhov

married actress Olga Knipper, who had appeared in several of his plays. However, they often spent time apart, as Knipper continued to travel for her career, and they never had any children. During the Yalta period, Chekhov wrote much fewer short stories and focused more on dramas, which led to his last two plays *Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), the latter of which was performed just six months before Chekhov died of tuberculosis.

INTERNATIONAL FAME

Although he was a famous literary voice in Russia during his lifetime, Chekhov didn’t achieve international notoriety until after World War I when many of his works were translated into English. Although he is still criticized by some for his simplistic plots, Chekhov’s emotional, conflicted and often times, desperate characters still greatly appeal to modern audiences. In fact, his work is said to be second only to William Shakespeare in stage popularity.



THE WORKS OF CHEKHOV

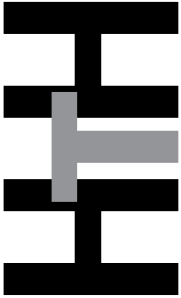
Although you don't need to understand any of the Chekhov references in order to enjoy *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, now might be a good opportunity to check out some of his classics. Notice anything familiar?

- ***Uncle Vanya*** depicts the elderly Professor Serebryakov's return to his country estate with his much younger second wife Yelena. Vanya, the professor's brother-in-law through his deceased first wife Vera, still lives at the estate with the professor and Vera's daughter Sonya; both act as caretakers of the estate and are shocked when they find out the professor plans to sell it to support his life with his new wife.
- ***The Seagull*** studies the clash between the older and younger generations. Renowned but fading actress Irina has returned to her brother's estate with her lover Trigorin, a popular fiction writer, who along with Irina, is a member of the elite Russian artistic community. During their visit, Irina's son and amateur writer Treplyov puts on his new play starring Nina, an ingénue romantic who dreams of a stage career. These four protagonists are entangled in multiple love triangles among each other and the poor schoolteacher Medvedenko and the estate manager's daughter Masha.
- ***Three Sisters*** portrays the longings of three young provincial sisters. Olga, the matriarchal eldest sister, is a schoolteacher who at age 28 is considered a spinster. Masha, the 25-year-old artistic middle sister who trained as a concert pianist, is in a loveless marriage with a man she married when she was 18. Irina, the youngest sister at age 20, dreams of falling in love and believes she could find it in Moscow, where the sisters lived until 11 years ago. In fact each of the sisters wish to go back to the sophistication of Moscow where they felt they were happiest. The play begins on the first anniversary of the their father's death, which also happens to be Irina's "name-day."
- ***The Cherry Orchard*** tells the story of an aristocratic Russian woman named Lyuba Ranevsky who returns to her family estate, which includes a large and well-known cherry orchard. Mrs. Ranevsky is paying one last visit before the estate is auctioned off to pay off debts; she has been living in Paris while grieving the deaths of her husband and son who passed away within a month of each other six years ago. Although she is greatly in debt, Ranevsky cannot curb her spending and wavers between not wanting to lose her home and turning down others' offers to help keep the estate.



From these descriptions alone, you'll probably be able to pick out several references to Chekhov throughout the play.

- **How many can you find?**
- **To which plays did they refer?**



PICCOLO: a small flute

METAPHOR: a figure of speech to compare two things that are alike figuratively but not literally

HERON: a long-legged, long-necked and usually long-billed bird

HARBINGER: an omen

IDES OF MARCH: reference to the date March 15, when Roman leader Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C.

AMITY: friendship

ENMITY: hostility

CALAMITY: disaster

ENTREATY: an appeal

INCIPIENT DEMENTIA: emerging intellectual deterioration, usually a result of old age

TROJAN HORSE: term used to describe a person or thing intended to undermine or destroy from within; a reference to the classical mythology story in which the Greeks hid in a gigantic hollow wooden horse, disguised as an offering, to destroy Troy and win the Trojan War

DOROTHY PARKER: an American writer known for her wisecracking wit who produced poetry, short stories and screenplays in the mid-20th century

DOTAGE: an offensive term for the lack of strength or concentration sometimes believed to be characteristic of old age

REPAST: a meal

NYMPH: a woman with graceful, delicate, fairy-like features

LIBATION: a strong drink

NAME-DAY: the feast day of the saint after whom a person is named

AGAMEMNON: a Greek leader during the Trojan War who was killed by his wife upon his return

INTUIT: to feel

NORMA DESMOND: a character in the 1950 film *Sunset Boulevard* who was a fading moving star

HARPY: a nagging or bad-tempered woman

TRAIPSING: to wander without purpose

MAGGIE SMITH: an English actress who has won two Oscars and been appointed a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire for her contributions to the performing arts. You may know her as Professor McGonagall.

STANLEY KOWALSKI: a working-class character from the 1947 Tennessee Williams play *A Streetcar Named Desire*

PIRANDELLIAN: describing a drama in which actors become inseparable and indistinct from the characters that they play; reference to the works of early-20th century Italian dramatist and poet Luigi Pirandello

SANGUINE: cheerful

POLLYANNA: an eternal optimist; reference to the child heroine of the 1913 eponymous novel

PRESENTIMENT: a feeling that something will happen

SELF-EFFACEMENT: humility or modesty

CAVORTING: frolicking or behaving in a festive manner

HARANGUE: a tirade

ETHEREAL: exquisite in an otherworldly manner



TIMES OF CHANGE

One of the most emotionally charged moments of *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* is Vanya's explosive monologue at the end as a response to Spike's incessant texting during Vanya's play reading. Vanya sees it as an insult—Spike sees it as multi-tasking.

Many people, especially older generations, can likely empathize with Vanya's frustration. Technology advances at an almost exponential rate, the pros and cons of which are a part of daily conversation nowadays. While many people may disagree over the benefits of increased dependency on technology, looking at the past to see how things have evolved provides a healthy new perspective.

Vanya: I know older people always think the past was better, but really—instead of a text with all these lowercase letters, and no punctuation, what about a nicely crafted letter, sent through the post office? Or a thank you note?

Spike: Yeah, yeah, it was real elegant back then, I get it. You had to wait five days for a letter, but it was real nice. Time marches on, dude.

Both Vanya and Spike have a point. It seems that the consideration and more articulate speech that comes with letter writing is a lost art. Then again, updates that you can exchange with your friends in a matter of minutes via texting or social media used to take weeks with the post office. Communication is definitely more efficient and environmentally friendlier now.

Vanya: We had telephones and we had to dial the number by putting our index finger in a round hole representing 2 to 0. If the number was 909-9999, it could take hours just to dial the number. We had to have PATIENCE then.

The phone Vanya is referring to is a rotary telephone where you had to turn a dial clockwise to call someone. Because the the 9 was the furthest away, you had to turn the dial nearly 360 degrees if the phone number had a 9 in it. Imagine having to do that every time you wanted to call someone rather than just asking Siri to "call Mom."

Vanya: There are 785 television channels. You can watch the news report that matches what you already think. In the 50s, there were only three or four channels, and it was all in black and white.

The television used to be a cornerstone of every American household, half because of the entertainment value and half because it was often a great opportunity for the family to join together and share an experience. In fact, did you know that from 1959 to 1991, the only way most families saw *The Wizard of Oz* was when it was televised once a year as a regular broadcast tradition? It became a highly anticipated event for many families. And there was no DVR to record it, so if you missed your favorite scene, you had to wait until next year to see it again! It's difficult to imagine that now with the endless options on cable and streaming video websites such as Netflix, Hulu and Amazon.

